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ABSTRACT

Methods used to diagnose a seven-year old boy's reading problems illustrate the fact that reading assessments based upon a reader's strengths and a reader's understanding and control of the process will provide information which is more useful to teachers and parents than that provided by the numerical results of standardized tests. After Andrew, the first grader being assessed at the Pupil Appraisal Center (University of North Texas), refused to complete the "Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests," the assessment shifted away from questions about what children his age should know to questions about what Andrew does know: what knowledge of the conventions of written language Andrew has; how he views himself as a reader; what he would like to improve about himself as a reader; what he believes reading is; what strategies he thinks are available to him as a reader; and which types of reading situations, if any, he approaches with confidence. These questions provided a basis for understanding Andrew's approach to reading and an opportunity for the clinician to approach Andrew in a positive way. Using such tools as a patterned language storybook, "The Reading Interview," and the "Concepts about Print Test," the clinician made several recommendations to Andrew's parents and teacher for the adoption of specific practices which should help Andrew become a more self-assured and adept reader. (Twelve references are attached.) (MHC)

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Reading Assessment for the Young Reader

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READING ASSESSMENT FOR THE YOUNG READER

Reading Assessment for the Young Reader

Andrew sits quietly at his desk, looking at the stack of worksheets he has been given as part of his reading class. He rubs his eyes, looks at the papers in front of him, and starts working. But it is only a matter of moments before Andrew he starts chewing on his pencil and stops completing the assigned work. This has become a daily routine for Andrew, one which reveals his feelings about learning to read.

Andrew is a child who is experiencing considerable difficulty in learning to read. His teacher reports he has been learning to read very slowly. When she gives him worksheets to complete in class, he takes far longer than the other children and consistently fails to complete them in the time allotted. When it comes to oral reading in class, he reads slowly and haltingly, uses little if any appropriate expression and often gives up on words which she thinks should be easy for him to identify. His teacher states that, after six weeks of instruction in alphabetic phonics, he still does not know several letters or the sounds associated with them. Even though he was entering his eighth month in the first grade, his teacher still explains that he cannot or will not complete his assigned "pre-reading workbook pages."

At the age of seven, Andrew has decided that learning to read is hard work. He has become discouraged; he has given up trying. He believes that he is a failure as a reader and that he will

never be able to read.

When Andrew was referred for evaluation of his reading at the Pupil Appraisal Center at the University of North Texas, a clinician was assigned to conduct an assessment of his reading in order to understand what was causing Andrew's reading problem. Based on what was learned during that assessment, recommendations were to be made to both his teacher and parents to help him improve further as a reader.

A number of assessment tools are used regularly at the Pupil Appraisal Center. The specific assessment tools used depend on the individual being assessed and the objectives of the assessment. That is, for some older pupils the focus of the assessment may be on how effectively the individual reads and studies for learning in academic classes. For others the assessment may consider how effectively the pupil is learning to read and what instruction would be most beneficial in helping that individual to continue the process of becoming literate. The objectives for the assessment vary from one case to another.

The Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests (Woodcock, 1972) were used with Andrew to gather information placing him in comparison with his agemates. The first subtest, Letter Identification, was completed successfully. His score indicates that he is performing about as well as might be expected for his grade placement. The second subtest, Word Identification, was completed less successfully with scores which place him at a level of a child just beginning first grade. When the third subtest, Word Attack (sounding out nonsense words), was presented, he attempted the

first two items with limited success. He then quickly dropped to the floor and refused to continue any further. He had reached his breaking point and did not want to cooperate further.

The partial results from the Woodcock tests suggest that Andrew has gained some knowledge necessary for becoming a reader. The results of the tests (to the extent they were completed) indicate that Andrew may even have been reading at or slightly below a level appropriate for his age and grade level. However, since he refused to go further, such conclusions are tentative at best. The problem is then to determine what Andrew knows about reading and how he can best be helped to develop further as a reader. In this situation, the Woodcock was not a useful tool in assessing Andrew's reading. The information gained from the Woodcock provided little which might be used to help him improve as a reader.

QUESTIONS GUIDING ASSESSMENT OF READING

When a student is tested by the reading specialist or clinician for the purpose of diagnosis, the diagnosis is guided by a set of questions. Those questions may be overtly asked and used to guide the diagnosis or they may be unstated questions which are never overtly considered. In either case, the answers to those questions become guideposts in helping the teacher design an effective reading program for that student. Questions such as these form the basis of many evaluations of reading:

> What level of reading material should be used when teaching the child to read?
> How does the child perform in reading in comparison with other children of similar age or grade placement?
> How well does the child comprehend reading material in response to predetermined questions?
> What are the child's skills in word attack, word recognition and comprehension?
> What weaknesses does the child have that should be addressed through instruction?

Questions such as these may be best answered through testing, either by formal or informal types of tests. Yet questions like these led to very disappointing answers for Andrew. He ranks at the bottom of his class and agemates as a reader; his independent reading level, his instructional reading level and his frustration reading level are all the same, at the preprimer level or lower. Though he tried to apply what he had been taught about phonics and word attack (at one point in the assessment he read "on boy" for "one day"), he was failing in attempts to read even what seemed to be a simple passage.

Results such as these represent a problem for teachers completing diagnostic testing with young children. They fail to give clear direction for the teacher responsible for providing Andrew instruction in reading. Should the teacher provide more instruction similar to what has already brought Andrew failure?

Should she work on reteaching Andrew those skills or subskills which he has failed to learn? Or should the teacher select an alternate approach to reading instruction for Andrew? If any alternate approach is to be used, how should the approach be selected? The questions which guide the diagnosis are nonproductive in planning effective instruction for children like Andrew.

Major changes in the questions guiding the evaluation of Andrew's reading were necessary if appropriate suggestions, based on the assessment, were to be made to the teacher. These changes move away from a perspective of what children should know to become readers to a perspective of what Andrew does know. The questions become questions of where Andrew stands developmentally in relation to knowledge and abilities relating to reading.

As a result, an alternative set of questions was employed to examine Andrew's reading. Instead of the questions presented above, the following questions were used in guiding Andrew's assessment in reading:

> What knowledge of the conventions of written language does Andrew have as a reader?
> How does he view himself as a reader? What would he like to improve about himself as a reader?
> What does he believe reading is? What strategies does he think are available to him as a reader?
> Which types of reading situations, if any, does Andrew

approach with a sense of success and confidence?

> How does Andrew approach problems he had when reading? What strategies does he employ?

> What strengths does Andrew bring to reading which the teacher can build on in approaching reading instruction?

These questions call for information gathered through assessment, which "means gathering information to meet diverse needs. It occurs at many levels of an educational system, but always draws upon a variety of instruments and strategies, depending on the conditions" (Teale, Hiebert & Chittenden, 1987, p. 772). The conditions with Andrew were those of a child who had refused to continue cooperating, a child who was unwilling to show what he did or did not know, a child who was discouraged about his ability to learn to read. These questions provided a basis for assessing Andrew's approach to reading and his knowledge of written language. They also provided the opportunity for the clinician to approach Andrew in a more positive way, a way designed to avoid the types of situations which earlier had led to his failures, frustrations and anxieties.

ASSESSMENT DEVICES USED WITH ANDREW

Continuing the assessment meant working with a child who was discouraged and frustrated. His resistance to the testing situation had to be overcome. One indication that Andrew was reluctant to continue was that he stood silently in the corner of

the room for several minutes, hiding behind the door. The clinician told him that the assessment would continue when he decided he was ready. To encourage him to sit down and abandon the safety of the corner, the tests previously used with Andrew were removed from the area. After that, he took his seat, but was still unwilling to continue. Silence characterized the next few minutes, a silence which spoke strongly of his reluctance to continue. Eight minutes after taking his seat, Andrew softly said that he was ready to go on.

When the assessment was resumed, a patterned language task was used with Andrew. The benefits of patterned language, or predictable language, books have been advanced by many (Rhodes, 1981; Bridge, 1979; Bridge, Winograd & Haley, 1983). This was a relatively simple reading task which utilized a patterned language book. The purposes in using such a task were to determine if Andrew identified the pattern used in the book, utilized the cues available to him in the book while reading it aloud and maintained the meaning of the book when dealing with problems he encountered. This task was also employed to see if he would respond to such books with confidence and success.

A book, Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do You See? (Martin, 1970), was laid on the table in front of him upside down and backwards. This book was a patterned language book which was predictable and easy to read by using both the cues provided in the text and the pictures available in the book. Andrew was then asked to turn the book so that he could begin reading it. After a long pause, he turned the book right side up and turned past the

cover and the title page, stopping at the first page of text. When asked where to begin reading, he pointed to the leftmost letter of the top line of print. When asked to read the book, he refused, telling the clinician that he couldn't read. The clinician began reading after explaining to Andrew that he could join in whenever he felt comfortable doing so. By the time the clinician had reached the second page of the text, Andrew joined in quite willingly. Before beginning the third page, Andrew drew his chair close to the table, pulled the book toward himself and began reading the book independently.

Andrew read the book smoothly and fluently, stopping only periodically to "sound out" or "attack" words he did not recognize or predict immediately. He stopped once to sound out the word "looking." He remembered the pattern of the book and successfully predicted what would the word should be. That prediction, combined with his knowledge of phonics, enabled him to quickly identify the word and move on. At another point, he reached the word "children" and, after thinking about it for several seconds, decided that the word must be "students" and proceeded quite smoothly. That fit the context of the passage, maintained the meaning of the text and was acceptable according to his limited knowledge of phonics (i.e., he understood that "ch" had a single sound and he applied a sound which had certain articulatory similarities to the sound he had been told should be associated with that grapheme). That is, in this situation where he was feeling confident in what he was doing, Andrew used more than his knowledge of phonics in trying to identify the unknown word. He

also used picture cues in determining what might be appropriate; he used his understanding of the text to select a word which fit at that point in the text, both syntactically and semantically.

The Reading Interview (see Goodman, Watson & Burke, 1987, p.219) was used with Andrew in order to allow the clinician to consider his concept of reading and how he saw himself as a reader. When he was asked what he could do when he came to something he didn't know while reading, Andrew spoke of looking at letters and working at "sounding it out." When pressed further, he identified his secondary strategy as asking the teacher for help. These responses suggested to the clinician that Andrew believed reading was a process of accurately identifying letters, sounds and words with little emphasis on developing meaning or understanding. He viewed himself as not being a good reader and seemed to consider reading to be a waste of his time and efforts.

In recent years, researchers have established that children have knowledge of environmental print before entering school (Goodman & Altwerger, 1981; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984). This had been identified as Print Awareness, the knowledge children gain about written language as they seek to understand and make sense of the world around them. A Print Awareness task was used to enable the clinician to determine if Andrew recognized the functions and forms of written language on signs, labels and box tops. The task allowed Andrew the opportunity to relate to printed materials in his environment.

A Print Awareness task, composed of items which are likely to have been part of his environment, was presented to Andrew. The

task used with Andrew employed only items which contain the full, rich information available in environmental print. That is, the coloring, the style of print and the stylistic logos all were intact. When he was shown a cup from Coca-Cola, the form did not retain the three dimensional presentation of the cup. It was mounted on a flat surface and covered laminated to protect it. Yet all other characteristics of the cup remain complete.

The first item, a side label from a box of Aim toothpaste, was shown to Andrew. He looked at it for a few moments, then said it was toothpaste. When asked what kind of toothpaste he thought it was, he went to the word "AIM" and attempted to sound it out. After several attempts at sounding it out, he arrived at "alum" as the brand name for the toothpaste.

Throughout the ten items included in the Print Awareness Task, Andrew accurately identified five; he also identified the meaning of every item presented except one (a wrapper from a fast food chain not present in the area where he lives); he knew the difference between print and pictures, was aware of the directionality of print and of the differences between numbers and letters or words. Additionally, when he identified an item of which he was sure, he showed delight in the fact that he knew it with certainty. While such delight would be relatively inconsequential on a standardized reading test, it was viewed as significant in this assessment. He felt delighted and proud that he could be so confident in his knowledge.

Andrew demonstrated a lack of confidence in his knowledge of written language during the Print Awareness Task. One item in the

task was the right hand corner of a copy of TV Guide, containing only the title of the magazine. He immediately identified the item as "TV Guide." When he was asked to show where it said TV Guide, he told the clinician that it did not say that at all, that he was only guessing. Another item in the task was an advertisement for an automobile which had two policemen standing next to their police car. When asked if it said anything in the picture, he quickly responded that it said "policemen." When he was asked where it said that, he once again said that he had only guessed and that it did not say that anywhere. Yet when his attention was drawn to the word "POLICE" on the side of the car, he attempted to sound it out. The resulting pronunciation was "PULIK." Here he denied his knowledge which was appropriate to the task. His lack of confidence in himself as a reader showed clearly in these instances.

One final measure, the Concepts about Print Test by Marie Clay (see Clay, 1979), was used with Andrew to consider his knowledge of books and how they are used as well as his awareness of the language often used to talk about reading, metalinguistic awareness. Andrew did not read the book himself, yet he did demonstrate knowledge of books, how they are organized and used, as well as metalinguistic knowledge appropriate to reading. He was familiar with the front-to-back, left-to-right, top-to-bottom organization of the book. He provided appropriate terminology relating to the book (page, top, bottom, pictures, letters, words). Furthermore, when he was asked to identify a word and a letter, he did so appropriately. Yet he was uncertain of the

function of punctuation in the book. Andrew also demonstrated an appropriate voice-print match by pointing to words as the clinician read. The test includes deviations from the expected word order in the text and distorted spellings of common words (e.g., eth for the). He failed to detect these deviations between text and what might be expected.

WHAT WAS LEARNED FROM ANDREW

Through the completion of these activities, Andrew provided much information which could lead to a better understanding of how he approaches reading. That information, in turn, could be extremely helpful to his teachers in providing appropriate instruction to him in reading.

In spite of his knowledge of the written language system, he did not believe he was a capable reader. He viewed himself negatively as a reader and had basically given up on becoming a reader, considering it either unimportant or too difficult. He believed reading was knowing the right words at the right time. When completing the Print Awareness Task, Andrew's behavior suggested that he lacked confidence in himself and would abandon an accurate response quickly if a teacher even mildly questioned his response.

Andrew demonstrated awareness of many of the conventions of written language, such conventions as directionality and distinctions between print and pictures. He also demonstrated an appropriate voice-print match when the clinician read aloud. His

performance with the Print Awareness Task suggested that, when provided with full, rich context for written language, he was able to focus on meaning. He showed that he was aware of the many of the functions of written language. He was also able to apply the terms "word" and "letter" with an appropriate understanding of each.

The one area he would like to see himself improve as a reader was in identifying unknown words. It was here that he was experiencing considerable difficulty and the strategies he had developed were ineffective for him. The only strategy he was consciously aware of for identifying unknown words was sounding them out. For him, that strategy was inadequate.

Yet Andrew showed that he could approach reading with a high level of success and confidence when he was able to supply a large amount of what Smith (1978) refers to as "non-visual information" (information which was in his head rather than on the page) to what he was reading. This non-visual information includes the reader's knowledge of language and of the world in general, his personal interests, his purpose for reading, his knowledge of reading and texts and how they operate. Andrew demonstrated that he could and did use other strategies in dealing with unknown words provided that those words are presented in a full, rich context.

When completing the Patterned Language Task, he used the pattern of the book, the cues available from the picture and the syntax and semantics of the passage to aid him in word identification as he read. The ability to use his prior

experiences in approaching a reading task was clearly demonstrated in the Print Awareness Task. The more he contributed to the materials, the more successful and confident he became.

Under circumstances where the non-visual information he could contribute was restricted, he approached reading problems by sounding out the words - with a limited amount of success. Yet when he was able to contribute non-visual information with confidence, he was able to use strategies which capitalized on more than one source of information and, therefore, his strategies were more effective. A major concern was apparent in his willingness to abandon correct responses which he drew from the realm of non-visual information.

Finally, the clinician found many strengths on which Andrew's teacher could base instruction. First, Andrew took obvious pleasure when he felt confident and knew he was right. That sense of excitement or pride could motivate his success as he comes to feel more competent and confident in his reading. Second, when using highly predictable materials, Andrew successfully utilized strategies other than sounding out words. Such experiences would help him become aware of the strategies he could use when reading. As he develops as a confident reader, he should be able to apply those same strategies with less predictable material. Third, Andrew had firm control over many conventions of written language. This should serve him well as he becomes a stronger reader. Fourth, he was both willing and able to apply his prior knowledge and experiences (non-visual information) in his reading when he understood that they could and do have a place in his reading.

though his confidence at times faltered. This should help him in developing the ability to monitor his own reading comprehension to determine when he was successful and when he was not. Andrew brings to his reading many of the strengths which most young readers bring. Yet these strengths have been negated through his belief that learning to read is too difficult for him to continue to try and his fear that the frustration he has already experienced will continue if he tries any more.

Goodman (1986) maintained that the major task of helping readers at risk was to help them revalue their own competence as language users and as language learners. With Andrew this is most important. Before he can succeed as a reader, he must recognize and value (or revalue) his own competence as a language user and as a language learner in reading. By valuing the competence which he has already, he then can approach learning to read with a sense of success. The risks involved in expanding his competence may then seem worth taking.

The final recommendations to Andrew's parents, his school and his teacher were based on helping Andrew to become more confident and self-assured as a reader:

1. Andrew should be helped to recognize and appreciate the strengths he has as a reader so that he can build on those strengths as he develops further as a reader.
2. Andrew should be offered daily opportunities for Sustained Silent Reading both at home and at school. These periods

could be for as short a time as ten minutes or as long as thirty minutes. Self-selection of reading materials should allow Andrew to control the difficulty and length of reading passages.

3. Andrew should be provided the opportunity to serve as a "student aide" to a teacher working with younger children, possibly at the kindergarten level. Andrew should be encouraged to read to the children. Andrew's favorite books or other reading materials could be used for these purposes. When Andrew is asked to read to the children, he should be provided the opportunity to pre-read and practice the materials before reading to the children. This should help him develop a sense of pride and control over his reading.
4. Andrew should be provided a risk-free environment for learning. He needs the support, encouragement and understanding of a knowledgeable, caring teacher. It is important that he not be criticized or marked off for what he does wrong. Instead, he should be encouraged to experiment with written language and develop a personal understanding of how the system works. Mistakes should be considered as important parts of his efforts to become more competent as a reader rather than being negative or unacceptable.
5. Andrew should be helped to realize that he has alternatives available to him when he encounters difficulty while reading. Sounding out words is only one

alternative he has available to him.

6. Andrew should be read to frequently, both at home and at school. Different types of materials should be read to him. These materials should include highly predictable or patterned selections from children's literature, the comic section from the daily or Sunday newspaper, newspaper stories of interest to him, books from children's literature he might find interesting - any materials which will help him learn that reading, and being read to, is pleasant and beneficial.
7. When Andrew is reading, emphasize meaning and what he understands from what he is reading rather than emphasizing accuracy. Instructional approaches used with Andrew should avoid focusing on meaningless drills, boring worksheets or seatwork which is primarily used to kill time in the classroom. Such materials will only serve to obstruct further development in reading. Focusing on reading will allow Andrew to utilize a strength he demonstrated during the assessment.
8. Encourage Andrew to develop strategies for knowing when he is not understanding what he is reading. Encourage him to ask himself three questions as he reads: Does it sound like English? Does it make sense? Does it fit together? A no answer to any of these questions should help him to realize when he is not understanding what he is reading. He should learn to self-correct when it is appropriate as well as to vary his speed and strategies to meet this

purpose for reading.

9. Relax and have fun with Andrew as he develops as a reader. Provide him notes in his lunch box; share jokes with one another through notes or letters; put favorite comic strips on a bulletin board or refrigerator. Help him to use written language in a fun and playful manner. Basically help him realize that reading is a pleasure, not a chore.

These recommendations provide a framework from which instruction for Andrew could begin. They also form a basis for instruction as he develops and matures as a reader.

CONCLUSION

Andrew was like too many children in the schools today: struggling in learning to read, encountering more difficulty than he should and beginning to believe he cannot succeed in becoming a reader. The prospects for learning to read for children such as Andrew are dim unless instructional strategies are used which will help them feel confident and successful as readers, help them revalue what they can do while helping them develop further as readers.

Standardized measures used for reading diagnosis which provided numerical results and levels of reading yield only numbers, numbers which do not give teachers clear indications of where to begin or how to provide appropriate instruction. When

assessments are conducted based on the reader's strengths and the reader's understanding and control of the process, then information becomes available which could help that reader become confident and capable in learning to read. That, after all, is the purpose of reading instruction. "If we approach assessment in a productive and developmentally appropriate manner, both teaching and learning in early childhood programs can be enhanced" (Teale, Hiebert & Chittenden, 1987).

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